

How data is changing golf biz | 10 most innovative people in golf

Golf Inc.™

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE YEAR



A stunning addition to Mike Keiser's Sand Valley project takes first place in the annual Golf Inc. competition, enhancing the Wisconsin resort's growing reputation as a must-play golf destination.

change as it relates to technology and the marketing of golf.”



Nick Sherburne
Club Champion
Willowbrook, Ill.

The key to Club Champion’s success is a trait commonly associated with innovators: the ability to recognize the potential of an emerging technology and then adapt that technology for another use.

For Sherburne, the technology was the TrackMan Launch Monitor. From the age of 16, he’d been custom-fitting clubs the old-fashioned way, by feel and instinct. But TrackMan, which provides a wealth of unbiased, data-driven insight about a player’s swing, enabled him to see how expertly tailored clubs could generate longer, more accurate shots.

The result: As most retailers continue to sell golf clubs, Club Champion sells optimal performance and, most importantly, lower scores.

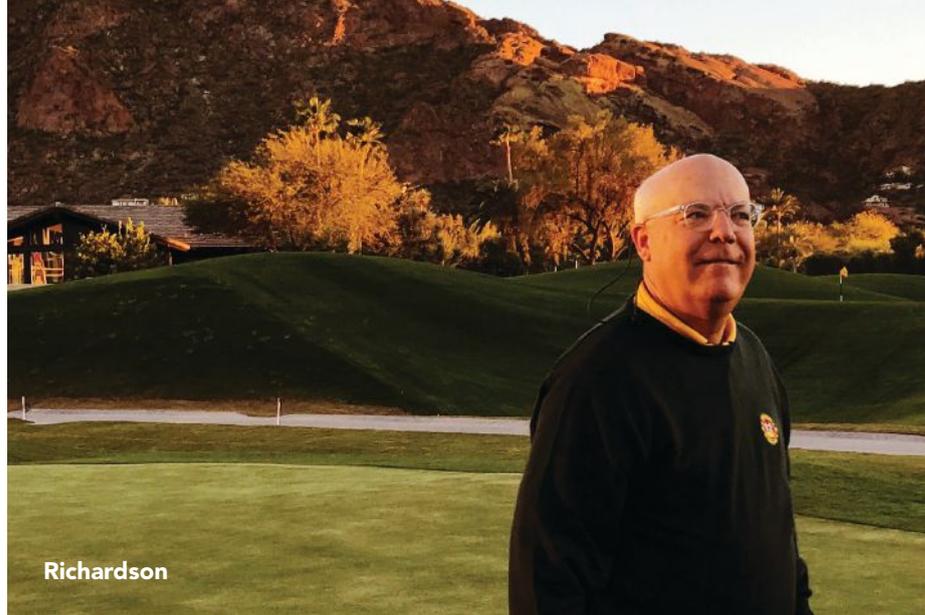
“We’ve fought an uphill battle,” Sherburne said. “Twenty years ago, people felt that they weren’t good enough for personalized club fitting, or that it was too expensive. But we’ve educated consumers and the industry. Your equipment changes how you swing a club.”

Today, Club Champion is one of the golf industry’s premier retailers. It had 42 stores heading into 2019, all of them company owned, and it expects to have 75 by year’s end. Last year, it generated \$51 million in revenues, up from \$7.5 million in 2013.

The stores offer what’s said to be “a Tour-quality fitting with a first-class experience.” Each customer’s shots are ana-



Sherburne
CLUB CHAMPION



Richardson

lyzed by a TrackMan and a SAM PuttLab, and the data is evaluated by club fitters who’ve completed Sherburne’s training program. The clubs are built by combining heads and shafts from all the best-known manufacturers, creating 35,000 options in all.

Because innovation is integral to Club Champion’s DNA, the 9-year-old company is certain to evolve as new technologies are created and customers’ needs change.

“I’ve always tried to figure out why something is what it is,” Sherburne said. “I’m not complacent. I ask questions. As a company, we asked how we could make things better. We want to push boundaries.”

Thanks to Sherburne’s foresight and his partners’ business acumen, custom club fitting is no longer a niche business. An entire industry is following Club Champion’s lead.



Forrest Richardson
Forrest Richardson
& Associates
Phoenix, Ariz.

Richardson has a prediction about what’s on the horizon for golf.

“The course of the future,” he wrote in an e-mail, “may look like what we think of golf today, but it will be far more entertaining and connected.”

It’s a future that Richardson welcomes. From one perspective, his career has followed a predictable architectural arc: He carved out backyard courses as a boy, stud-

ied the masters in Scotland and served an apprenticeship with an established designer. But since he set out on his own in 1988, he’s challenged the conventional wisdom, evangelizing for values — affordability, playability, sustainability and especially enjoyability — that the industry has only recently welcomed.

“I’ve always been willing to go in different directions,” he said, “and I look at things from different angles.”

Talk about different angles: Richardson floated the idea of a par-2 hole nearly two decades ago and then created one at his Short Course at Mountain Shadows. Years ago, he published a little book, “Course Brains,” to help owners accurately evaluate their properties and maximize their resources. Today he’s advocating a new way of measuring success in golf operations, with metrics such as cost per yard and revenue per yard that put courses of all types on an equal footing.

“You’d be surprised at how the numbers turn out,” he said.

We’d also be surprised if we had to wait long for Richardson’s next idea that golf isn’t ready to accept.



Scott Campbell
The Retreat, Links
& Spa at Silvie
Valley Ranch
Seneca, Ore.

Outsiders see things differently. That’s part of the reason why Campbell, a retired veterinarian and a complete golf neophyte, was willing to risk part of his fortune on

Campbell and wife



a truly original golf getaway in one of the most remote areas of the U.S. mainland.

Campbell's eco-friendly, home-on-the-range resort occupies a sliver of his 140,000-acre cattle ranch in what's known as "Frontier Oregon," a sparsely populated region that needs economic rejuvenation.

To attract well-heeled itinerant golfers, some of the smartest minds in the business advised Campbell to invest in brand-name architecture, but he disregarded their guidance. Instead, he commissioned a little-known designer, Dan Hixson, to produce something akin to frontier golf at a complex that features one of the world's few reversible courses, a rules-optional par-3 track and a madcap seven-hole layout where goats serve as caddies.

"We knew we needed to be different," Campbell said. "From the beginning, we wanted to create a golf experience that would be fun for all golfers."

The emphasis on fun may be the rage today, but Campbell set his plans in motion a decade ago. And it wasn't the first time he thought outside the proverbial box. In the 1990s, via a partnership with PetSmart, he turned a single animal hospital into what's been called "the largest companion veterinary practice in the world." After he sold his stake, he bought Silvie's Valley Ranch, which is just miles from the town where he was born and raised.

"I don't accept any dogma, not just in golf but in any business," he said. "Sometimes that makes things uncomfortable for the people I work with."

Campbell hopes to start turning a profit next year, but he acknowledged that the jury is still out on the gamble he's taken. Nobody said the life of a pioneer would be easy.



Tom Pashley & Bob Dedman Jr.

Pinehurst Resort
Pinehurst, N.C.

Pashley and Dedman face a difficult problem: They must modernize one of golf's most eminent resorts — the Cradle of American Golf — without compromising its revered, historical soul.

For the better part of a century, Pinehurst was the resort that all others aspired to be. In recent years, however, the world's most passionate golfers have been lured to other golf destinations — in particular, to resorts with neo-classical courses, fun-to-play short layouts and Himalayas-inspired putting tracks.

In response, Pashley and Dedman have restored the original, natural appearances and playability of courses No. 2 and No. 4. They've opened a nine-hole, par-3 track and a putting course, both of which encourage responsible beer consumption, as well as a sports bar and a brew-pub. They've even relaxed some dress codes.

It's an evolution tailored to golfers who didn't grow up with Nicklaus and Palmer, let alone Hogan and Snead.

"We're taking aggressive steps to make sure we stay as relevant with the next generation of golfers as we are with the previous," Pashley said.

And surely, more changes are on the horizon. The past may be prologue, but Pinehurst's future depends on a commitment to change.



Ken Morton Sr.

Morton Golf
Management
Sacramento, Calif.

In a business that's claimed countless victims, Morton has thrived. It's no surprise to hear him lauded as the most successful municipal golf operator in the nation.

Few in golf have accomplished so much

and received so many accolades. In addition to being the longtime operator of the city of Sacramento's golf properties, Morton is a PGA Master Professional, a member of the PGA of America's Education Faculty, a former president of the Association of Golf Merchandisers and a member of the National PGA Hall of Fame.

Morton has also set the bar in operations, thanks to close observation of his customers, endless learning and a willingness to put fresh ideas into practice, particularly ideas that have the potential to create new revenue streams.

For example, he turned his driving range into a 24-hour-a-day operation. He welcomed FootGolf and organized annual events — notably, demo days and a music festival — that attract crowds to his properties. He employs a women's golf ambassador, a full-time video production manager and three people to oversee wide-ranging social-media campaigns.

"I'm constantly examining what's happening with our customers and the industry in general," he said, "and I look to change with the times."

Of course, changing with the times means keeping up with them. Morton never misses the annual PGA Merchandise Show, which he views as "the most profound place to learn and grow," and he's as committed to data collection as any of his peers. He has also embraced communication via smartphone, because he thinks it's the most effective way to engage today's golfers.



DEVELOPMENT OF THE YEAR

HONORABLE MENTION

Links at Silvies Valley Ranch

SENACO, ORE.

Developer: Silvies Valley Ranch
Architect: Dan Hixson
Contractor: Silvies Valley Ranch

Two words: Goat caddies.

Yep, you read that correctly. This is one quirky, fascinating and possibly game-changing golf resort. It includes a reversible course as well as 9-hole and 7-hole novelties.

The 7-hole course, called McVeigh's Gauntlet, features goats that serve as caddies. Oh, it also includes a par-2 hole.

Fun. Golf need to be fun, Scott Campbell, one of the owners, has told several

golf publications.

Architect Dan Hixson created the reversible course, which includes 36 holes, using 27 greens. Some of the holes stand alone while others are shared. (It's complicated ... yet fun.)

The resort is in remote eastern Oregon, situated within a sustainable cattle and goat ranch. The idea behind the project is to bring tourism to this part of Oregon, the entry said.

"The hope is that this property can serve as an example within the region on how to attract new visitors, celebrate the natural beauty of the area and grow new jobs for those living in the region."

As with the other honorees, this project is much about environmental stewardship. To battle mosquitoes, pesticides are not used. Instead, it uses a nesting practice to produce "vibrant swallow and bat populations to work day and night shifts along the golf course."



What the judges said:

"The first word that comes to my mind is rustic, but not in the sense that it is plain, simple or classic or unsophisticated. I find it to be rustically elegant, classic and smart in almost every way. While all of its individual pieces are done exceptionally well, together they all seem to showcase the overall beauty of the property." —Chet Williams



PHOTO BY BRIAN OAR

HONORABLE MENTION

Arcadia Bluffs – South Course

ARCADIA, MICH.

Developer: Arcadia Bluffs LLC
Architect: Fry/Straka Global Design
Contractor: Turnkey Network Solutions

What the judges said:

"Love the old-school architecture. Well executed."
—Casey Paulson

One word: Square.

That's the signature geographic shape of Arcadia Bluffs' new South Course, a look inspired by Chicago Golf Club.

Two titans of early American golf architecture, C.B. MacDonald and Seth Raynor, were involved in the Chicago design. MacDonald created the course; Raynor, his protégé, later redesigned it.

The South Course features a host of square and rectangular shapes – including bunkers and greens – with fairways sporting the same hard angles. A lot of golf critics and players have

been wowed by the throwback design.

"It is a testament to the challenges and emotions experienced at a few select, classic private courses from golf's earliest days," Bill Brown of Fry/Straka Global Design wrote on his entry form.

